




## Unit 4 Article Assignment: "texas Must Be Oars"

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For your unit 4 article reading assignment, please read the article "texas Must be Oars?" Submission (20 points): 1 page max, double-spaced, 12 point font

-  One paragraph summarizing the author's thesis and supporting evidence (underline what you believe to be the author's thesis). If you use any direct quotations, please use quotation marks.
-  One paragraph in which you demonstrate analysis and synthesis. Break down the argument, evaluate and discuss. End with a statement that connects to the larger picture of US history in this time period.
-  Work should be typed and submitted on paper. Names should be typed on the top.

### Article text:

From the moment he entered the White House in March 1829, Andrew Jackson of Tennessee turned a cold and calculating eye on Texas. Sitting in his study on the second floor of the mansion, maps strewn around the room, the white-haired, sharp-featured, cadaverous President breathed a passion for Texas that was soon shared by other Americans.

Old Hickory always believed—or so he said—that Texas had been acquired by the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and then had been recklessly thrown away when "that old scamp J. Q. Adams" negotiated the Florida treaty with Spain in 1819 and agreed to the Sabine River as the western boundary of the country. The claim was questionable at the very least, but many Southerners, outraged by Northern reaction to the slavery issue during the debates over the admission of Missouri and chagrined over the institution's prohibition in the Louisiana Territory north of 36° 30', decided to press it anyway.

The loss of Texas by virtue of the Florida treaty dismayed some Americans. It infuriated Jackson. "How infatuated must have been our councils who gave up the rich country of Texas," he wrote. Such action, in his mind, verged on treason. And why had it happened? "It surely must have been with the view to keep the political ascendance in the North, and east," he fumed, "& cripple the rising greatness of the West." No matter. He ] would attend to it at the first opportunity. And indeed he did—or tried to. "I have long since been aware of the importance of Texas to the United States," he wrote a friend just a few months after taking office as President, "and of the real necessity of extending our boundary west of the Sabine....I shall keep my eye on this object & the first propitious moment make the attempt to regain the Territory as far south & west as the great Desert."

All his attempts at acquiring Texas proved feeble, however, mostly because he had assigned a freewheeling, fasttalking, double-dealing incompetent to represent the United States in Mexico. Col. Anthony Butler made numerous "diplomatic" efforts to purchase Texas from Mexico, and when those failed, he turned to bribery. "I have just had a very singular conversation with a Mexican," he wrote Jackson in October of 1833, and this Mexican "has much influence with the Presidt. Genl. St. Anna." The Mexican had bluntly asked Butler, "Have you command of Money?"

"Yes, I have money," Butler responded.

The price would be high, said the Mexican, in excess of half a million dollars. The Mexican himself required two or three hundred thousand, and Butler allowed that "there are others amongst whom it may become necessary to distribute 3 or 4 Hundred thousand more."

"Can you command that Sum?" the Mexican demanded.

"Yes," Butler assured him.

He was wrong. "I have read your confidential letter with care, and astonishment," a furious Jackson replied, "...astonishment that you would entrust such a letter, without being in cypher, to the mail." Moreover, wrote Jackson, he was astounded by Butler's presumption that "my instructions authorized you to apply to corruption, when nothing could be farther from my intention than to convey such an idea."

At length Jackson had to recall Butler. The President was discouraged not only by the diplomatic failure and the shady operations of his minister but also by the resistance of the Mexicans to his assurance that a "natural boundary" at the Rio Grande River would work to the mutual benefit of both nations. Such a boundary, Jackson insisted, would eliminate "collisions" that two peoples of "conflicting laws, habits and interests" were bound to have. Moreover, it would provide the Mexicans with needed cash to bolster their economy: the President was willing to go as high as five million dollars to purchase the territory. Failure of the sale was sure to encourage the many Americans who had moved to Texas over the previous ten years to establish an independent republic. And such a turn of events, the President feared, would sever the "bonds of amity and good understanding" between the United States and Mexico.

Since the early 1820s, Americans had been migrating to Texas, particularly from the South and West. Motivated to a large extent by the hard times generated by the Panic of 1819, they sought relief in Texas because the Mexicans encouraged them to settle there. Led by Moses Austin and his son Stephen E, they established an American colony in Texas and accepted Mexican authority. Slave owners from Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee were particularly attracted to this haven. By 1830 over twelve thousand Americans had emigrated to Texas, and Mexico, alarmed, eventually prohibited all immigration from the north.

Many Texans desired immediate annexation by the United States, especially after 1829, when slavery was forbidden throughout Mexican territory. The blatant and hostile intentions of these Texans naturally provoked the Mexicans, and Jackson's fumbling efforts to purchase the territory only exacerbated an already worsening situation. Despite his passion for Texas, the President wanted neither war with Mexico nor domestic strife over the wisdom of adding what might become another slave state. Still, he would not abandon his dream of territorial expansion. "The boundary between the U. States and Mexico," he jotted into his private memorandum book, "...must be altered."

Two months after Texas won her independence, the United States and Mexico were on the brink of war.

Jackson's apprehensions deepened when he learned that his old friend and protégé, Sam Houston, late governor of Tennessee, had fled to Texas after a disastrous marriage and reportedly "would conquer Mexico or Texas, & be worth two millions in two years." These were the "efusions of a distempered brain," said Jackson; Houston would never place millions before the welfare of his country, but that did not guarantee a peaceful resolution to the problem.

Perhaps, given Mexico's stiff opposition to territorial dismemberment, no one in the United States possessed the diplomatic skill to bring about the peaceful acquisition of this valuable and strategically important landmass. But certainly Jackson botched what little chance he may have had by appointing Butler and then keeping him long after Jackson had reason to believe that his minister was a scoundrel. Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna was convinced that the United States had acted dishonorably and had violated its neutrality laws by encouraging filibustering expeditions into Texas and by arming Americans to instigate revolution.

The failure of American diplomacy did indeed spur the Texans to take matters into their own hands. A war party was formed at the same time that the Mexican government was moving to centralize control over all parts of the Mexican republic, including Texas. The struggle for independence ignited in October 1835 and roared to its climax when General Santa Anna marched into Texas at the head of a five-thousand-man army. Texas proclaimed its independence on March 2, 1836, and on April 21 a Texan army commanded by Sam Houston defeated Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto. Santa Anna himself was captured and forced to sign a treaty (later repudiated) recognizing Texan independence.

No American doubted that annexation by the United States would soon follow. Some Texans might have preferred to remain a republic, but probably many more desired eventual statehood.

The Mexican minister to the United States, Manuel Eduardo de Gorostiza, peppered President Jackson with angry protests. He raged against American treachery and ultimately demanded his passports. Relations between Mexico and the United States rapidly deteriorated, and within two months it appeared that war between the two countries would break out momentarily. The secretary of the Navy, Mahlon Dickerson, reported at a cabinet meeting that Com. Alexander J. Dallas had notified him that the American consul and residents at Tampico had suffered innumerable “indignities” at the hands of Mexican authorities. Moreover, American armed vessels in the area had been refused water, and their officers had been denied permission to go ashore. Worse, these authorities had threatened to put to death all Americans in Tampico in retaliation for the capture of Santa Anna.

Dickerson concluded his report. Benjamin Butler, in a letter to his wife, explained what happened next. Jackson “broke out in his most impassioned manner.” He jumped to his feet, gesticulated wildly, and shook his fist at invisible enemies. It was one of the most frightening displays of the President’s anger that the cabinet had ever witnessed. The members sat frozen, staring; nobody dared interrupt the wild outburst.

Then, wrote Butler, Old Hickory barked, “Write immediately to Commodore Dallas & order him to blockade the harbour of Tampico, & to suffer nothing to enter till they allow him to land and obtain his supplies of water & communicate with the Consul, & if they touch the hair of the head of one of our citizens, tell him to batter down & destroy their town & exterminate the inhabitants from the face of the earth !”

The cabinet sucked in its collective breath, but said nothing. Could he be serious?

Finally, Jackson addressed his secretary of state, John Forsyth. “Have you rec<sup>d</sup> any information on this subject?”

Forsyth shook his head.

“Then let the Secy of the Navy furnish you the papers,” Jackson ordered, “& do you write immediately to Mr. Gorostiza informing him of the orders we have given to Commodore Dallas, & that we shall not permit a jot or tittle of the treaty to be violated, or a citizen of the United States to be injured without taking immediate redress.”

Fortunately, cooler heads on both sides prevented the extermination of the citizens of Tampico, but American-Mexican relations continued to deteriorate: Texans were doing everything possible to force U.S. recognition of their independence and eventual annexation. Commissioners dispatched to lobby in Washington were all warmly received by the President. During one such meeting Jackson turned to Special Commissioner Samuel Carson and said, “Is it true, Mr. Carson, that your Government has sent Santa Anna back to Mexico?” Carson responded that Santa Anna was indeed expected to depart shortly to assist in winning ratification of the treaty recognizing the independence of Texas.

“Then I tell you, Sir,” said Jackson, “if ever he sets foot on Mexican ground, your Government may whistle; he, Sir, will give you trouble, if he escapes, which you dream not of.”

Then there would be war, Carson said.

“Where is your means, Sir, to carry on an offensive war against Mexico?”

“In the enthusiasms of the American people,” said Carson happily, “their devotion to the cause of Liberty are the ways and means, to defray the expenses of the War.”

Jackson blanched. It was one thing for the President of the United States to threaten war, quite another for “outsiders” from Texas to presume they could manipulate this country into one. The United States had a treaty with Mexico, and the annexation of Mexican territory would most certainly be viewed around the world as a betrayal. Civilized countries would label it a brutal and aggressive act, a violation of the “law of nations.” The “Texians,” as Jackson frequently called

them, must realize that annexation would take time and careful planning. Thus, when Stephen F. Austin sent him an impassioned letter requesting assistance, Jackson wrote the following endorsement: “[Austin] does not reflect that we have a treaty with Mexico, and our national faith is pledged to support it. The Texians before they took the step to declare themselves Independent, which has aroused and united all Mexico against them ought to have pondered well, it was a rash and premature act. our neutrality must be faithfully maintained.”

And there were other problems. Abolitionists, for one. These troublemakers would exploit any issue to attack slavery, said Jackson, even if it ruptured relations between the North and South. They intended to oppose the admission of Texas because it represented the continued expansion of slavery. Texas, therefore, posed a possible threat to the Union, which hobbled Jackson’s efforts to negotiate a swift treaty of admission. His passion for Texas could never match his passion for the Union. “Prudence,” he later wrote, seemed to dictate that “we should stand aloof” and see how things would develop. No doubt he was also fearful of jeopardizing the election of his hand-picked successor to the Presidency, Martin Van Buren.

At this juncture Sam Houston decided to send Santa Anna to Washington to meet Jackson in the hope that their talks together would help the cause of Texas annexation. Houston released the Mexican, presented him with a handsome horse, and headed him (under armed escort) to the capital. Santa Anna arrived on January 17, 1837.

At the moment, Old Hickory was recovering from a severe “hemorrhage of the lungs” that had almost ended his life. For months he remained in his room, not daring to expose himself to a relapse by needless movement around the White House. In fact, he left his room only four times during the final six months of his administration. Still, on state occasions, Jackson could muster great presence and exude the appearance of enormous strength. For his part, Santa Anna, despite his long trip, looked refreshed and relaxed. He was amused and rather pleased by the notoriety that his arrival in the capital had provoked. Many assumed he would look malevolent. They were surprised to find him a gracious and cultivated man of impeccable manners and dress.

On Thursday, January 19, 1837, the Mexican general was escorted into the presence of the American general at the White House. The two men greeted one another politely and with a degree of dignified reserve. Always the gentleman, Old Hickory assured his guest that he was most welcome in Washington and expressed pleasure in meeting him at long last. “General Andrew Jackson greeted me warmly,” Santa Anna later wrote, “and honored me at a dinner attended by notables of all countries.” Jackson treated him not as an enemy but as a head of state, even though Santa Anna had been succeeded in Mexico by Anastasio Bustamante.

The official greeting, reception, and dinner went extremely well, but the conversations involved nothing of substance. Not until the following day did the two men turn to the matter that had brought them together.

Santa Anna began by proposing the cession of Texas for a “fair consideration.” The United States, responded Jackson, could do nothing about a cession until the “disposition of the Texians” was resolved. “Until Texas is acknowledged Independent,” said the President, this nation could make no official move. At some point in the conversation, Jackson outlined a proposal for the Mexican to take back to his country. Beginning with the supposition that Mexico would officially acknowledge the independence of Texas at some point early on, Jackson suggested that the boundary of the United States be extended to include Texas and northern California—in effect, this would run the “line of the U. States to the Rio grand—up that stream to latitude 38 north & then to the Pacific including north California.” In return the United States would compensate Mexico with \$3,500,000. “But before we promise anything,” Jackson continued, “Genl Santana must say that he will use his influence to suspend hostilities.” The President assured his visitor that the principal objective of the United States was not territorial acquisition or the further embarrassment of the Mexican Republic, but rather to “secure peace & tranquility on our respective borders & lay the foundation of a permanent tranquility between the U.S. and Mexico.”

The interview ended on a polite but indefinite note. President Jackson provided Santa Anna with a warship to carry him to Veracruz, and the Mexican had nothing but gratitude for his treatment.

A little later Jackson mentioned his conversation with Santa Anna to William Wharton, recently arrived in Washington to represent Texas. Wharton protested: Texan independence was an accomplished fact achieved through her own military

power, and Mexico had no right to make a treaty that in any way bound her. What the United States must do, insisted Wharton, was to recognize Texan independence; then the nation could move on to the question of possible annexation.

Jackson grimaced. Perhaps, suggested the President to Wharton, as a way of quieting the sectional rivalry that recognition was sure to provoke, Texas might claim California in order to “paralyze” Northern opposition to annexation. Acquisition of California along with Texas meant the continuation of representational balance in the Senate between free and slave states. The suggestion did not elicit much enthusiasm from Wharton. Texas could never legitimately claim California or undertake a war to assert its claim. California was simply not on the negotiating table.

Congress, however, responded to the wishes of the “Texians” without grappling with the sectional consequences and, during the final days of Jackson’s administration, recognized the independence of the Texas Republic. The President quickly appointed Alcée Louis La Branche of Louisiana as chargé d’affaires to Texas, and the Senate confirmed the nomination only hours before the final adjournment of Congress. Around midnight, when word came that La Branche had been confirmed, Jackson met with Wharton and a few others to celebrate. They lifted their glasses in a single toast: Texas!

But Jackson returned home defeated in his one great effort to reach the Rio Grande. He rightly feared his failure might jeopardize the integrity and tranquillity of the Union.

The more he thought about it, as he sat in his study at the Hermitage reading the reports that arrived daily from Washington, the more he convinced himself that the security of the United States demanded the acquisition of Texas. Never mind the machinations of abolitionists. They were nothing compared with the danger posed by foreign enemies: Great Britain, for example.

If Britain should decide to reenter the continent through Texas and attempt a linkup with Canada, then war would be inevitable. “The safety of the republic being the supreme law, and Texas having offered us the key to the safety of our country from all foreign intrigues and diplomacy,” Jackson wrote, “I say accept the key...and bolt the door at once.” If England concluded an alliance with the “Texians”—which seemed under way at that very moment—then she would most likely move “an army from Canada, along our western frontier,” march through Arkansas and Louisiana, seize New Orleans, “excite the negroes to insurrection,” “arouse the Indians on our west to war,” and “throw our whole west into flames that would cost oceans of blood & hundreds of millions of money to quench, & reclaim....” As he wrote these words, Jackson worked himself into a passion. “Texas must be ours,” he raged. “Our safety requires it.” Later he repeated his demand with a little less passion but with the same determination. We must have Texas, “peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must.”

Despite strong Northern pressure, the new President, John Tyler, obtained a treaty of annexation signed by representatives of Texas and the United States in April 1844 and submitted it to the Senate for ratification. It was accompanied by an extraordinary letter to the British minister to Washington, Richard Pakenham, written by the secretary of state, John C. Calhoun. In it Calhoun contended that the treaty had been signed for the express purpose of protecting American slavery from British attempts to bring about universal emancipation. The extension of the American slave interests into Texas, he said, would nullify that “reprehensible” goal.

Friends of annexation groaned when they read copies of Calhoun’s provocative letter. The secretary had placed annexation “exclusively upon the ground of protection of Slavery in the Southern States!” and the senators from the nonslaveholding states who favored annexation were furious because “it would be death to them, politically, if they were to vote for the Treaty based on such principles.”

Why had Calhoun done it? Why had he jeopardized the treaty by the gratuitous mention of slavery? Maj. William B. Lewis, one of Jackson’s oldest friends, claimed to know. The secretary of state meant to kill the treaty, he wrote, in order to “drive off every Northern man from the reannexation” and thereby give him a “pretext to unite the whole South upon himself as the Champion of its cause.” Put simply, he meant to divide the Union, create a Southern confederacy, and make himself the “great man of this fragment which he expects to tear from the embrace of our glorious Govt.” Like abolitionists, Lewis added, Southern hotheads were determined to disrupt the Union to achieve their own selfish

objectives. Unfortunately, Texas had become a pawn in the fatal game of personal ambition. As far as Jackson was concerned, between “that arch fiend, J. Q. Adams” and that “Cateline,” John C. Calhoun, they were tearing the Union apart.

So the treaty failed. And shortly thereafter the ostensible Whig and Democratic candidates for the Presidency in the next election, Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren, publicly announced their opposition to annexation. Clay (himself a slave owner) regarded annexation as dangerous to the country because it might provoke a war with Mexico, excite sectional passions over slavery, and prove financially disastrous, since the \$10 million Texas debt would have to be assumed by the United States. Van Buren was especially concerned over the sectional rancor and possibility of war.

Jackson believed passionately that national safety rested on acquiring Texas “peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must.” Jackson “shed tears of regret” when he read the letter of his old friend Martin Van Buren. “I would to god I had been at Mr. V. B. elbow when he closed his letter. I would have brought to his view the proper conclusion.” The only course of action left was to dump Van Buren as a presidential candidate and nominate someone else, someone who “is an annexation man,” he wrote, “and from the Southwest.” Other Democrats agreed, and at the national nominating convention in Baltimore, they “arranged” to replace Van Buren with James K. Polk.

Clay and Polk ran a close race. Among other things, Polk promised to “reannex” Texas, claiming like Jackson that it was part of the Louisiana Purchase and had been shamefully surrendered by that “crazy old man, John Quincy Adams.” In the election, he won 170 electoral votes to Clay’s 105. The popular vote was even closer: 1,337,243 to 1,299,062. Polk defeated Clay by a 1.4 percent margin. “A mere Tom Tit,” growled John Quincy Adams, had triumphed over the “old Eagle. The partial associations of Native Americans, Irish Catholics, abolition societies, liberty party, the Pope of Rome, the Democracy of the sword, and the dotage of a ruffian [Andrew Jackson] are sealing the fate of this nation, which nothing less than the interposition of Omnipotence can save.”

Between the time of his election and inauguration, Polk met several times with Jackson at the Hermitage. Old Hickory instructed his friend on the necessity of annexing Texas in order to “put to rest the vexing question of abolitionism, the dangerous rock to our Union, and put at defiance all combined Europe, if combined to invade us.” But Polk needed no instruction. Upon his arrival in Washington, he was queried by many members of Congress about his plans and goals. “He is for Texas, Texas, Texas,” reported Sen. Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina, “& talks of but little else.” The outgoing President, John Tyler, saw his opportunity to capitalize on Polk’s victory, and he helped arrange a joint resolution of annexation for both houses of Congress. After considerable politicking the House and Senate gave their approval, and Tyler signed the resolution on March 1, 1845, just three days before he was to leave office. A messenger was immediately dispatched to Texas with the “glorious” news.

“Texas is ours,” trumpeted the newspapers. “The Union is safe.” A feeble old man who had only a few months to live added his voice to the general acclaim. Andrew Jackson thanked God that he had lived to see this happy day. “I...congratulate my beloved country [that] Texas is reannexed,” he wrote, “and the safety, prosperity, and the greatest interest of the whole Union is secured by this...great and important national act.”

But others expressed more disturbing views. They feared that the admission of Texas would lead inevitably to war with Mexico and possibly civil war. And their direst predictions proved correct. Texas ratified annexation on July 4 and was admitted into the Union as a slave state on December 29, 1845. The following spring—on May 11, 1846—the United States declared war against Mexico. Later the North and South submitted their dispute over slavery to a frightful test of arms. Within twenty years the Union cracked apart, and to weld it back together did indeed take “oceans of blood & hundreds of millions of money.”